Quick Study® ACADEMIC

Keys to MIDDLE SCHOOL Success

BEGINNING THE SCHOOL YEAR RIGHT

Discuss Real Feelings

- If your child is not as excited about school as you are, don't shoot her down. If you do, she'll stop telling you how she feels. What sounds like a small concern may be symptomatic of a deeper worry.
  EX: A worry about clothes or appearance may be a sign of worries about social status. Listen to what your child is really saying.
- Talk about how you two will address any fears or concerns your child has.
  EX: If he's worried about making friends at a new school, remind him of previous social successes. If she's worried about a new class, remind her that you'll still be there to support her academically.

- If your child has to find her own way to class for the first time or is worried about getting lost in a large school, consider taking a tour of the building together or looking at a map of the school layout.
- If your child is just not ready to let go of summer, discuss what he might look forward to.
  - What does your child find fun? One student will really enjoy athletics, while another will love academics even though he might not admit that to his friends. Maybe it's extracurricular activities, easier access to his social life, or new people, but there's something fun in school for everyone.

Set Clear Expectations

- Let your child know how much learning matters to you. Children still care about your approval at this age, even though some try not to show it.
  - What do you want to see from your child? Maybe it is great grades or maybe it's a different sign of progress, but clear expectations will go a long way toward your child's success.
    › This clarity will help you both trust one another. As other things in your child's life change, she needs to know that her parents' goals for her are plain and unchanging.
  - Talk with her directly about her goals for herself, short term and long term, and tell her about your goals for her.
    › Listen to the differences, and if your goals conflict, try to talk about it without just telling her she's wrong.
  - If he starts to fall short of the short term goals and it concerns you, talk to him about it directly.
    › Even if it's a hard conversation, it'll be easier because he'll understand why you want him to meet those goals.
  - What do you hope for your child's grownup life, and how will school help her get there?
    › Your child may not be thinking this far ahead yet on her own, but if you two plan together, she can learn to do so on her own too.
    › This is a good way to help him learn to dream about his future. Dreams are what ambitions are built on.
- Middle school is the perfect time to transition into taking school seriously while you don't have to worry about grades getting her into or keeping her out of the right college.
- Some elementary school teachers don't assign very much homework and don't worry much about late work, but that is going to start changing now if it hasn't already.
  - Your child will need to build study skills and learn to take responsibility.
  - If she thinks of this as the beginning of her teenage life, and a new era of power and responsibility for her, she'll be more ready to take charge academically.

PARENTAL SUPPORT

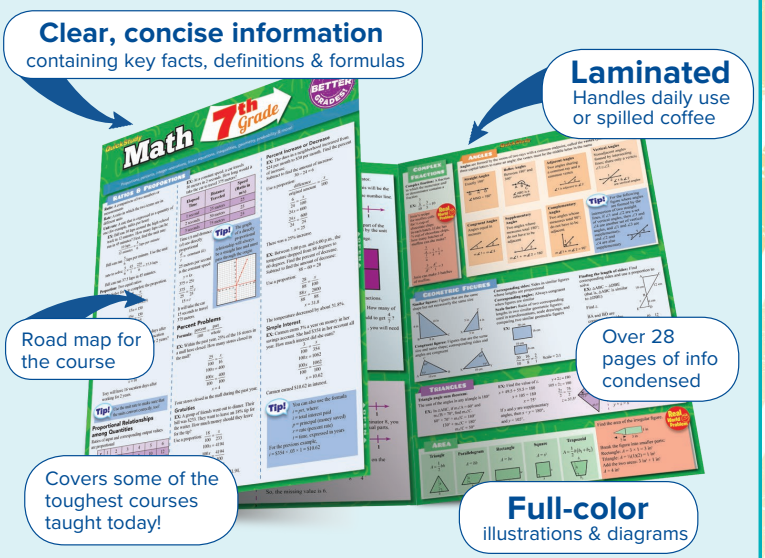
Setting the Right Attitude

- Be positive, but when the going gets hard, be clear that you expect your child to persist and not give up.
- Your child is human, so he will test you to see if you will let your standards slip—even if you do make them clear ahead of time.
  - This is the time to stand your ground, because if he sees evidence that you may give in, he will keep trying.
  - If you can, stay cheerfully firm and make it clear that tired or not, you expect her to keep her side of the bargain. She won't spend much effort trying to change your mind next time.
- Make sure your child *knows* you have her back.
  - Children at this age can hide more anxiety than we think, and may say "I know, mom" even when you're saying something they desperately want to hear.
  - Their confidence in your appreciation and their general likeability will support them in the social stresses of middle school.

Encouraging Their Natural Interests & Strengths

- What makes your child bloom? Whether it is art, team sports, time in the science lab, or a good book, encourage it.
  - At the very worst, you are inspiring a growing mind. It may not be obvious how those dreams will turn into a career, but they may well.
- Natural interests and strengths are important to a child's self-confidence.
- Some of your child's interests will be things he is definitely not good at. Encourage those too.
  - Sometimes there is less pressure on children when they are participating in an activity they are only mediocre at.
  - If your child tends to do well in school, the experience of not excelling will be good for him. No one will always excel in life, so it's useful to know how to enjoy yourself when you aren't the very best.
  - Your child needs to know that you are okay with her not being great at everything.

WHAT IS A QuickStudy GUIDE?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Covers some of the toughest courses taught today!
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Building Productive Parent-Teacher Relationships

- Try to make sure you can go to any meet-the-teacher night your child's school may hold. The scheduling can be inconvenient, particularly if your child doesn't give you much notice, but face-to-face time is priceless.
  - Plan ahead what you want to say to the teacher. Know you might not get much one-on-one time.
  - Think about what stands out about your child, or what key might help the teacher unlock your child's mind.
  - If you get a chance for a one-on-one meeting, listen to what the teacher tells you about your child.
    - › You may learn about a face of your child you don't usually see.
  - You may be able to help the teacher with questions she has about your child.
  - This is your chance to reassure yourself that your child is doing well. If you want reassurance that your child has friends or does his work, this is a good chance to ask.
- If there is something your child should be doing, you'll hear, so if the teacher gives basic cheerful praise, you can know you have a successful young middle school student on your hands.
  - Sometimes, particularly as class sizes increase, a good kid who isn't struggling with anything gets "Tanya does what she's supposed to, and she does a good job at it."

- Let your child know that you support his teachers and expect him to do as the teachers ask.
- Take it for granted whenever possible that the teacher knows what he or she is doing and has something valuable to teach your child.
  - There are times when you may disagree with the teacher's actions, way of maintaining discipline, or even what he or she teaches. This may happen when you talk to your child about what she is learning and what happens at school.
  - Remember, it's okay to talk to your child about it when you do disagree with the teacher, but try to aim more for, "Interesting. I learned to do that too, but I learned it a different way." Instead of "What a stupid idea! I don't think much of her!"
    - › Even if you are right in your criticisms of your child's teacher, he still needs to learn that subject this school year. It'll be easier for him to listen politely and learn if you keep your disagreements productive.
  - If your child's teacher or school disciplines her and you don't agree, it may be appropriate to talk to the teacher about it, but try to be careful what you say to your child.
    - › On one hand, you do want your child to feel supported, but on the other hand, your child may have to learn to live with this different system of rules. As he gets older, he'll have to handle other rules that are unexpected or even unfair, and this may be his chance to learn to cope with this.
- If you listen to your child making fun of a teacher without commenting, you are telling her that you are okay with that behavior. It may be funny, but your child will learn much more from your silence than you may intend.
  - Remember that mockery belittles, so it can get in the way of hearing the valuable things a teacher has to share.
- Problems happen even when teachers and children are both doing their best. As soon as you decide the relationship is starting to fray, you will want to step in, but start subtly.
  - Often your child can fix the problem on her own with your advice.
  - There are times when even the most well-meaning people cannot solve things second hand. If your child knows that you will meet with their teacher/principal as necessary to fix any problems that come up, she won't have to worry about feeling alone. Whatever happens, good and bad, her family will be there for her.

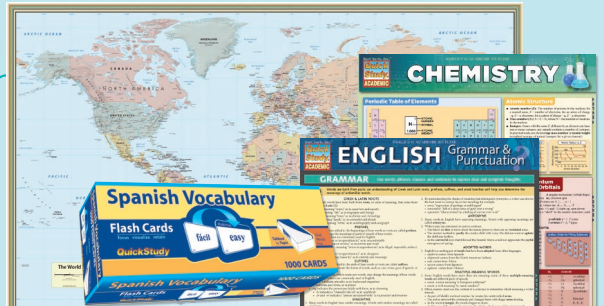
Academic Struggles

- If your child struggles academically, don't just hope it will go away. Once children get behind, catching up only gets harder. Step in and help your child as soon as you sense a problem is developing.
- Find the cause of the problem.
  - Try to get your child to talk about what is going on. He may not know what is wrong, but if he says nothing is wrong, he probably just doesn't want to talk about it. Still, it's worth pushing, as he is by far the best person to get the story from.
  - Some children strongly avoid talking about such situations, so if your child won't talk, you may have to sleuth.
    - › Check on your child's work. Is she doing it?
    - › Talk to your child's teacher. Does the teacher think your child is gradually slipping due to a learning disability, or has she suddenly stopped doing well? Maybe your child clearly understands the material, but just isn't turning in the homework.
- If the problem is learning-based or your child's teacher thinks it might be, consider having him assessed.
  - Any parent or legal guardian can request an educational assessment, as can your child's teachers.

    NOTE: The school cannot put any label into your child's record without your agreement as a parent.
  - If your child learns slightly differently than others, that doesn't make her any worse than others, but it may mean she needs different support.
  - If they do decide that your child learns differently than others, remember they may call it a disability, but that does not in any way mean your child is less smart. Many famous people have had such labels, including Albert Einstein.
    - › The school will let you choose whether that label goes down on your child's record. If you say yes, your child will qualify for extra help. The label can be removed later if your child outgrows it.
  - Your child will get an Individualized Education Program (IEP) if he receives special education services. The school is legally required to do whatever is in the IEP, so if they slip, *advocate* for your child.
- If the problem is social and academic, is your child is being bullied?
  - Get your child to talk to an adult at school. Many bullied children don't want to bother people with their problems or think no one would help anyway.
  - If your child is being bullied, start by giving her tools to handle it. It is better if you can give her advice that will let her solve her own problems. She does need to learn to cope with obnoxious people, and socially it's easier when parents don't have to step in.
    - › Talk your child through when the bully corners him, and see if you hear ways your child can turn the problem back on the bully or redirect them.
    - › Is your child saying things that are misinterpreted as weak and thus attracting the bully or bullies?
  - There are situations children can't cope with, particularly if grown-ups are supporting the bullies or passively allowing them to do what they want. If you sense that is happening, talk to the school authorities immediately.
  - If the bullying is physical, step in and talk to an authority.
    - › There are probably things he can do to avoid the bullies, but bullies shouldn't be dictating his life. Just as you shouldn't have to worry about physical danger, he shouldn't have to either.
- Support your child's confidence.
  - She needs to know that she can do this. If she starts assuming that a subject is too hard for her or that she's not good at school, she might give up.
  - Treat this trouble as an academic hill to get over rather than as a sign of future troubles.

WHEN TO USE QuickStudy

- As a road map for your classes
- At the start of the year as an overview to visualize how all the elements of the class will fit together
- All school year to refresh & reinforce the content
- During homework to understand and find answers quickly
- During class to find facts fast
- To prepare for a test, midterm, or final exam
- When on the go



DAILY ROUTINES & SUPPORTS

- It may be hard to do, but make sure your child is getting enough sleep.
  - Looking at a bright electronic screen stimulates parts of your brain the way the sun does. Try to avoid using electronics before bed yourself to set a good example.
  - Your child probably can't go to bed at midnight and wake up at noon, but if he is starting to want to, remember that this is natural.
    - › Current scientific research shows that as children move into their teenage years, their body clocks move drastically toward staying up late and waking up later.
  - Your child should be getting about nine and a quarter hours of sleep every night. When she's short on sleep, it'll be much harder to perform academically.
  - The more regular a sleep schedule your child can keep, the better.
    - › Although it helps to catch up some on weekends, if he sleeps until noon on Sunday, he's not likely to go to bed at a decent hour, and then he'll begin the school week sleep deprived.
- Don't push your child from task to task without breaks.
  - As children move into middle school, their lives can become full of extracurricular activities and sometimes there isn't much in between.
  - Actively schedule downtime so your child doesn't over schedule herself. She doesn't know her limits yet.
    - › There are many extracurricular activities, but middle school children can only do so much without overdoing it.
- Get as much done as possible the night before to clear time in the morning.

Homework Support

- Have your child get into the habit of doing her homework at the same time and place every day.
  - Encourage her to do her homework carefully and without distractions.
- If practical, have your child start on his homework as soon as he gets home.
  - If your child knows he has to finish writing out his sentences before he can go and call his friend back, he'll probably write the sentences faster. Conversely, if he knows that after his fun chat he has to go do homework, it may well slow the conversation down.
- Sometimes teaching responsibility seems to directly conflict with protecting your child's academic record.
  - On one hand, it is really important for your child to learn not to put homework off until Sunday night. On the other hand, you don't want to see her fail. Depending on where you live, you may even be thinking about middle school grades helping your child get into the right high school.
  - Everyone will have to decide how to handle this tension themselves, and there is no one right balance. But decide ahead of time!
    - › The night before a book report is due is *not* the time for you to decide whether you should be helping with it any more than it's the right time for your child to be starting it. She'll have enough emotions of her own for you both to deal with without you having to make what may be a stressful decision.
- If you decide to save your child from last minute mistakes or other bad decisions, don't tell him you will.
  - There is no point in him planning to need saving. Even if your child doesn't mean to, he won't try as hard to be responsible when he knows there won't be bad consequences.
  - She might think she would like to do her project with you the day before. You know how much work that project will be, but she may well think it'll be relatively easy. At this age—and well past it—children frequently underestimate difficulty.
  - If you decide you aren't going to organize her homework now, and you won't step in at the last minute, now is definitely the time to be clear about that.
- Teaching responsibility may still mean monitoring subtly.

Study Skills & Organization

- Without taking back anything about the importance of learning what you love, your child will need self-discipline.
  - High school, college, and the workplace, with all their distractions and higher stakes, are *not* going to be better times to learn.
- At this age, many children don't have any understanding of how long it takes to become good at a subject or activity.

REINFORCING LEARNING AT HOME

Connect what your child learns about at school with real-world activities. Visit the teachers' pages online or read newsletters for help staying informed.

Math

- Math will seem much more fun if you regularly give your child chances to see what math is really good for.
  - Perhaps your child finds space exciting. When you go to science museums, watch an astronomical event such as a lunar eclipse, or do other space-related activities, remind your child that it takes a lot of math to be an astrophysicist.
- Consider exploring a site with your child such as www.thirteen.org/get-the-math to learn about specific real-world applications in music, fashion, videogames, restaurants, basketball, and special effects.

Science

- There are so many amazing applications of science to see in the modern world. You can help your child love science by sharing them.
  - If you see an article in the newspaper or via social media about a new solar system, discuss it as a family. Was there a medical breakthrough that might help someone you know? Take the time to read a bit about the science behind it and discuss the great ramifications.
- Get involved as a family in the science around you.
  - Experience biology by enjoying nature as a family. This may mean camping, hiking, and going fishing. If you are less outdoorsy, consider going for a walk through a nature museum.
  - A visit to a planetarium or a telescope in the backyard can be great ways to explore the immense size of space.
  - A gift such as a decent chemistry set might start out by dazzling your child with flashy parts, but will then slowly draw her into more complex science.

Language Arts

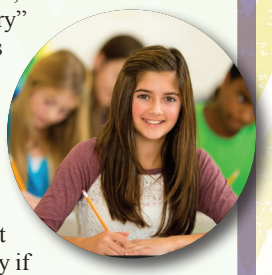
- Provide quality modern books for your child to read as well as classics. Online reading lists can be great sources for new ideas.
  - www.ala.org/alsc/tween-recommended-reads
  - www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2013/02/top-titles-for-tweens-2013
  - www.amightygirl.com/books?age_range_filter=5
- What is your child interested in?
  - If he is obsessed with robots and you want to encourage reading, consider science fiction about robots as well as robot-focused non-fiction.
- Reading plays makes much more sense when theater is a live concept.
  - Consider reading plays as a family, joining a local theater group, or attending local productions.
  - If you don't particularly enjoy theater, remember you don't have to pick a highbrow play. Ridiculous slapstick plays are still plays, and most plays are easier to understand on stage than they are when you're reading them.

EQUATION FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS!

QuickStudy + Textbook + Class Notes = Boosted GrA+des

Social Studies

- Current events can be a wonderful and inspiring way to discuss social studies.
  - Consider Malala Yousafzai as a recent example of someone who loves education and a young person who is changing the world for the better. She is also an example you can use to go as deep as you think appropriate into the Middle East and some of the things happening there.
  - Major elections can be an incredible way to discuss government. Discuss your political opinions with your child, and be ready for him to disagree. Even if his ideas are not fully thought out now, the practice of explaining them to you will be helpful. As your child thinks through consequences and articulates his opinions, he is learning.
- Even a relatively minor trip (e.g., to grandma's house in another state) can be a good way to discuss geography and other states.
  - If you are visiting Wisconsin, discuss the cheese industry. How did Wisconsin get to be such a big producer of cheese? Maybe visit a dairy.
- There are great historical documentaries available, and even a child who groans at the word "documentary" might love seeing a documentary on a topic she is very interested in. If your child thinks chainmail is cool, she might love to learn how medieval armorers worked.



World Language

- Consider learning a language with your child.
  - Remember, it will be easier to believe that you want them to take their foreign language studies seriously if you are studying vocabulary words too.
- Try to expose your child to the culture or cultures whose language they are studying. Vocabulary words may seem a challenge, but real live people are much more interesting.

The Arts

- Consider going to occasional cultural events together to expose your child to different practices and activities.
  - It depends on what is near you, but events from modern dance to glass-blowing can expand your child's experience.
- If your child has any interest in singing or playing an instrument, it is better to begin while he is young and yet mature enough to make the commitment.
  - As your child gets busier in high school, you two can decide whether it is worth continuing.

Physical Activity

- One way to get active can be to participate in a team sport. If your child doesn't know what she might enjoy or what she would be good at, start by picking an activity with low stakes.
- Scheduled physical activity can be a great way to structure the summer. If it is an inside sport, it can be a good way to keep active once cold weather hits.
- If your child doesn't like the pressure of a team sport, consider an activity such as dance or martial arts where no one else would be depending on him.
  - When done well, they can combine the camaraderie of more team-oriented activities with the freedom of solo activities.
  - They allow children to gain rank and build confidence as a certain goal is set (e.g., advance to the next belt level) and then accomplished. If she gains physical coordination along the way, all the better!
  - An activity such as dance or martial arts that doesn't have a season that ends is a great form of discipline.

MAINTAINING A CONNECTION

- Listen to your child. Be open to her feeling things that are inconvenient or undesirable.
- Keep being there for your child when he brushes you off.
  - He still needs you, and he's still a child, whatever he may think. If that means going to school and discussing a problem with his teacher, *do it*.
  - Remember, she's not *just* a child anymore. Maybe she can handle it herself with a little advice and encouragement.
- Continue getting to know your child as he changes. Don't assume he likes something because he did last year. Those little changes may seem trivial to you, but your child won't agree. They are the symbols of her growing up, and she needs you to show that you understand she is growing up and respect that.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

- Help your child know you appreciate him for whoever he is.
  - There is nothing wrong with knowing that your child loves science and is very good at it, but make sure that label doesn't become confining. If she wants to stop breathing science for the summer and instead read 60 novels, remember it's good to be well-rounded. Make sure she knows that although you may love how smart she is at science, you don't love her *because* of it.
  - You might tell your child "I love how well you sing!" While there's nothing wrong with saying that, make sure you sometimes let him know that you love when he sings regardless of how good he is.
- Make sure your child has a place where he can try new things safely.
  - Maybe she takes her instrument out to the garage where she won't worry about sounding awful or disrupting a business call.
  - Maybe he has a religious group that he knows will love him no matter what he does or an athletic team that welcomes everyone on their off days as well as their brilliant days.
  - Whatever it is, middle school is a time of great change, and children are more confident everywhere if they have a place where they don't need to perform.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

- An increased confidence is one piece of overcoming challenges, but there are other major components. Children need to learn to stick it through and keep going even when it's boring or seems too hard.
  - One way to encourage this is to treat errors as essential building blocks of success.
  - Even if you aren't at all critical of your child's mistakes, she can be a fierce self-critic. If she fears her own errors, then she won't want to do things that will require many initial false starts. If your child is like this, think about what you all could take up together. It might be good for your child to see mom or dad struggle or look absolutely ridiculous doing an activity, but then not quit.

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